

infotech by annette lamb and larry johnson

graphic novels, digital comics, and technology-enhanced learning: part 1

A young child giggles as Babymouse goes to camp.

A teen cries at the thought of the oppression experienced in *Persepolis*.

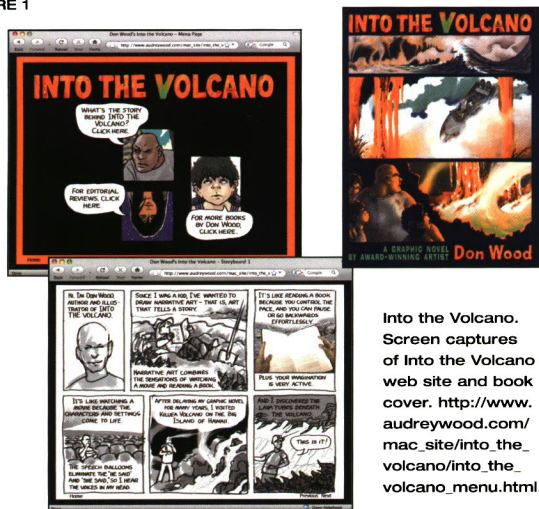
A librarian grins at the increase in physical and virtual library traffic.

No longer the sole domain of superheroes, the world of graphic novels and digital comics has exploded. From inspiring memoirs to engaging historical fiction, children and young adults are enjoying a broad range of visually-rich reading experiences.

Comic literature is leading the movement toward a seamless blending of print and digital reading opportunities. The demand for webcomics has skyrocketed and young people are becoming closely connected with authors and illustrators through publisher web sites, series forums, and extension materials.

Award-winning artist Don Wood's new graphic novel for young people titled *Into the Volcano* provides an example of this partnership between print and digital reading. The book is an exciting visual adventure about a three-day vacation that turns into a fight for survival when a volcano erupts. The author's web site, http://www.audreywood.com/mac_site/into_the_volcano/into_the_volcano_menu.html, provides a webcomic telling the story behind the novel. As students want to learn more about volcanoes, they can extend their exploration to volcano web sites such as Scholastic's *Weather Watch: Volcanoes*, <http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/wwatch/volcanoes/>.

FIGURE 1



Into the Volcano. Screen captures of Into the Volcano web site and book cover. http://www.audreywood.com/mac_site/into_the_volcano/into_the_volcano_menu.html.

THE COMIC BOOM: READING AND TECHNOLOGY COMBINED

Having grown up reading comic books like *The Archies* and magazines such as *Mad*, we have wondered about the recent surge in popularity of visually-rich literature. Why now? Much of the current popularity can be connected to the relationship between reading and technology.

Technology Tie-ins: From *Spiderman* to *X-Men*, traditional comics are being tied to a range of technologies from video games to hit movies. Young people enjoy seeing their favorite characters come to life on the big screen and seek to extend the experience through reading and gaming.

Major Awards: Comic literature has begun winning major awards for both adults and young people. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, a memoir by Art Spiegelman, got the ball rolling by receiving the Pulitzer Prize Special Award. Then, *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang won young adult literary awards including the American Library Association's Michael L. Printz Award. *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* by Peter Sis received a Caldecott honor and a graphic children's book by Eleanor Davis called *Stinky* received the Theodor Seuss Geisel Honor. Webcomics are also gaining literacy acceptance and have a special category in the Will Eisner Comic Award.

Notable Authors and Characters: With the introduction of Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* in a graphic novel format, mainstream authors are beginning to see the role of graphic novels in the publishing industry. The Young Bond series is out in graphic novel format and is linked to an online game called *The Shadow War*, <http://www.youngbondshadowwar.com/>, that involves reading and online problem-solving with a young James Bond as the hero.

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YA NONFICTION <

MATH + MATH = EVERYWHERE!

Five (Count on It!) Dana Meachen Rau. Benchmark Books, 2008. 978-0-7614-2970-8. \$15.95. Grades PK-1. This small book helps teach counting and reading with very simple, one-to-one correspondence of words and illustrations. Other titles in the series are **One, Two, Three, Four, and Ten**.

If you were a plus sign (Math Fun). Trisha Shaskan. Picture Window Books, 2009. 978-1-4048-4784-2. \$26.60. Grades K-3. Following the same format as the Word Fun series, appealing illustrations and simple passages take the reader from simple addition of 1 bear + 1 bear = 2 bears to presenting the idea of adding multiple, fun items of 8 red bracelets on one arm and 8 pink bracelets on the other = 16 bracelets. Concludes with a brief glossary, more books to read, web sites, and an index.

Pie graphs (Making Graphs). Vijaya Bodach. Capstone, 2008. \$23.36. 978-1-4296-0042-2. Grades 2-5. Through easy-to-read wording the concept of pie graphs is introduced with engaging photographs of a real pie. A simple glossary, read more, Internet sites, and an index round out this title. The Making Graphs series also includes Bar Graphs, Photographs, and Tally Charts.

Used any numbers lately? Susan Allen and Jane Lindaman. Millbrook Press, 2008. 978-0-8225-8658-6. \$16.95. Grades K-3. Each page uses a letter of the alphabet with a clever illustration to show how numbers are used everyday. "A" for apartment number, "B" for bus number, etc. For sharp eyes, additional examples of number use are found on the pages.

Timely Topics: Graphic novels such as *Persepolis* and *Pride of Baghdad* have brought world topics to the forefront. Books such as *In the Shadow of No Towers* by Art Spiegelman explore the events of 9/11. The *9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* provides an accessible alternative to the Commission report.

Child-Friendly: Authors are increasingly developing webcomics and graphic novels that are geared to the needs and interests of children. The webcomic *The Upside-Down Me*, <http://zipandbit.com/upsidedownme/>, explores the life of a little boy and his sister. Their latest adventures are called *The Sky Kayak*, <http://zipandbit.com/archive>.

Web 2.0: The growing popularity of blogs such as *The Graphic Classroom*, <http://graphicclassroom.blogspot.com/>, has provided a way for people to easily share reviews and favorite web sites about age-appropriate materials for young people.

In addition, many groups are providing web sites where comics can be shared and rated by others. *Kidjutsu*, <http://www.kidjutsu.com/> is a web site devoted to providing free, high-quality comics for kids.

COMIC LITERATURE: THE
POSSIBILITIES

While many of these visual reading experiences are available in a printed format, an increasing number can be found online. Let's explore some of the categories.

Cartoons: A cartoon is a full-size drawing. Visual balloons or bubbles may be used to depict speech and a caption is sometimes found across the bottom of the visual. These works of art are often humorous. Editorial cartoons are funny but often have a serious tone using irony or satire.

Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoonist's Index, <http://www.cagle.com/>, is a popular starting point for exploring online political cartoons.

Digitization projects have made historical political cartoons available on the Internet. For instance *Herblock's History*, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/herblock/>, is a collection found at the Library of Congress.

Some illustrators are combining technology with the cartoon format. For instance, *Mark Fiore*, <http://www.firstsecondbooks.com/>, is known for his animated political cartoons.

Comics: Comics, comic strips, and comic books contain a series of cartoon illustrations that tell a story. Presented in a sequence, comics may be a few panels or many pages. Digital or webcomics are simply comics that are available electronically through web pages, blogs, or e-mail.

You can read many popular comic strips online. For archives of past comic strips, go to the publisher web site such as *Archie Comics*, <http://www.archiecomics.com/>.

Increasingly, webcomics such as *On the Rocks*, http://www.funbrain.com/comics/comic_ontherocks.html, and *Brewster Rockit: Space Guy* http://www.funbrain.com/comics/comic_brewsterrockit.html, are produced specifically for the Internet and are directed toward young people. Many of these online comics such as *Girl Genius*, <http://www.girlgeniusonline.com/>, are revealed over a series of months or years with back issues available.

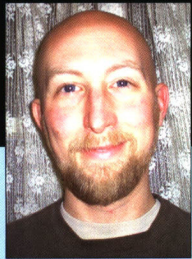
Some authors such as Chris Eliopoulos and his comic strip *Misery Loves Sherman*, <http://www.miserylovessherman.com/>, are combining their comics with blogs and other background information.

Although popular with teens, some webcomics such as *Penny Arcade*, <http://www.penny-arcade.com/comic/>, by Jerry Holkins focus on the video gaming culture and also contain some adult themes. It is important to preview webcomics before suggesting them to children.

Some publishers such as DC and Marvel, <http://www.marvel.com/digitalcomics/free/>, are posting preview comic books and sample issues on the Internet. For instance, you can read the original issue of *Amazing Spider-Man*. Other publishers are placing an entire series online such as *ElfQuest*, <http://www.elfquest.com/gallery/OnlineComics3.html> by DC Comics.

Comics designed for the Web are sometimes created in a different visual format than traditional print comics. For instance, the award-winning comic *Cooper*, <http://www.boltcity.com/copper/>, was created as a 15-inch by 15-inch square. This size and shape is easy to read on the computer screen.

Graphic Novels: Graphic novels are a more-lengthy version of a comic book. They usually have a more complex storyline than a traditional comic. Although many are for

JOE SUTLIFF
SANDERS

> GRAPHIC NOVELS

SCIENCE FICTION

Aldebaran: The catastrophe Leo. Cinebook, 2008. \$19.95. 978-1-905460-57-1. Grades 7 and up. Cinebook consistently publishes excellent European comics in English—comics that push at the genre boundaries North America has come to expect. *Aldebaran* is no exception. This story of a young man whose alien world is becoming more alien every day pleases even experienced science fiction readers through a mix of adolescent protagonists with unstable alliances, a thoroughly imagined setting, and creepy monsters who thrive in daylight.

The stranded Mike Carey and Siddharth Kotian. Virgin Comics, 2008. \$14.99. 978-1-934413-25-8. Grades 9 and up. Five normal people are stunned to discover they have another, forgotten life that began in a different dimension where they were beings of great power. But now the beings that chased them to Earth have come hunting and their power is greater.

Y: The last man (Deluxe Edition), Book One Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra. DC Comics/Vertigo, 2008. \$19.95. 978-1-4012-1921-5. Grades 9 and up. If you missed Y the first time around, DC's new line of deluxe editions—with sturdier binding—is your chance to start at the beginning of one of the biggest surprise hits of the last decade. This story of the only males to survive a mysterious plague that left women untouched is in turns controversial, startling, hysterically funny, and quietly moving. The chapters are immaculately paced, and the artist's soft faces make it impossible to predict who will be the betrayer and who is willing to sacrifice everything for the memory—or possibility—of devotion.

mature audiences, an increasing number are being produced for young people.

Many books are also available as graphic novels. For instance, *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman can be experienced three ways. It began as a traditional novel, became a graphic novel, and is now a major motion picture.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney, <http://www.funbrain.com/Journal/Journal.html>, and *Amelia Writes Again*, <http://www.funbrain.com/books/ameliaWritesAgain/book.html>, are examples of webcomics that later became paper-based books.

Many graphic novels begin as webcomic serials. While some of these online graphic novel series such as *The Dreamland Chronicles*, <http://www.thedreamland-chronicles.com/>, are written for children, others are designed for young adults. Sarah Ellerton has written online graphic novel serials appropriate for middle school students such as *Inverloch*, <http://inverloch.seraph-inn.com/>, and high school level such as *The Phoenix Requiem*, <http://requiem.seraph-inn.com/>.

Manga: Manga is a Japanese word for comic or whimsical pictures. The format is often associated with a particular style of drawing, but can be applied to a wide range of Japanese comics. Children around the world are wild about Japanese cartoons, comics, and graphic novels. Young people are bridging print and electronic technology by reading the books and enjoying the associated television programs, web sites, and games such as *The Legend of Zelda*.

Manga are typically read from top to bottom and right to left. Many publishers such as Viz Media provide free downloads of sample manga, <http://www.viz.com/downloads/manga/>. Some webmanga is available online such as *Aoi House*, http://www.gomanga.com/webmanga/archive_aoi.php.

Sequential Art: The category of illustration that includes cartoons, comics, graphic novels, and manga is called sequential art.

Some illustrators like to combine cartoons, comics, and other types of visual media. For instance, Richard Thompson's *Cul De Sac* blog, <http://richardspooralmanac.blogspot.com/>, provides a wide range of visual stories to explore.

Read *Understanding Comics and Making Comics* by Scott McCloud to learn more about the language of sequential art.

DIGITAL COMICS AND
GRAPHIC NOVELS ACROSS
THE CURRICULUM

There are many ways to use comics and graphic novels in teaching and learning. Let's explore some possibilities.

Personal Connections: Autobiography and biography are common themes of graphic novels. *To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel* by Siena Cherson Siegel is a memoir focusing on the life of a young dancer, while *Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow* by James Sturm and Rich Tommaso is a biography exploring the life of a famous baseball player.

Some books available in print form can also be accessed through web sites. For instance *The Graphic Biography* series from Saddleback Educational Publishers featuring titles such as *Amelia Earhart*, <http://www.wowio.com/users/product.asp?BookId=4815>, *Abraham Lincoln*, and *Babe Ruth* are available at the WOWIO web site for free, <http://www.wowio.com/>.

Capstone Press has a great series for young readers that focuses on the people involved with scientific discoveries such as *Isaac Newton* and the *Laws of Motion*, *Marie Curie* and *Radioactivity*, and *Thomas Edison* and the *Lightbulb*.

Consider activities that bring the people and time period to life. For instance, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* and *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return* by Marjane Satrapi, describe the life of a girl growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. The memoir is also available as a movie.

Design inquiry-based activities such as WebQuests that ask students to explore the life of a person. It might be a hero, famous person from history, or an ordinary citizen living in extraordinary times. Use interactive tools such as ReadWriteThink's *BioCube*, <http://readwritethink.org/materials/bio-cube/>, to summarize information and *Comic Life* software to create a graphic mini-novel featuring fictionalized encounters.

Fiction Connections: Young people can enjoy a wide range of fiction through graphic novels and webcomics. Stone Arch Books publishes many graphic novels for elementary level readers including *Blast to the Past* by Scott Nickel. With titles such as *Sardine in Outer Space*, *Tiny Tyrant*, and

Kaput & Zosky, *First Second* is another publisher focusing on graphic novels for elementary school students.

Look for enduring characters such as Babymouse by Jennifer L. Holm. Ask children to write their own stories incorporating these characters. Use the publisher web site for information about characters and books such as *Babymouse*, <http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/babymouse/>.

Mouse Guard by David Petersen is a graphic novel that can be read online or in print format. Use the *Mouse Guard* web site, <http://www.mouseguard.net/>, to explore characters, plot, and setting. Also, check out the author's blog to learn how the characters were created. Ask students to create a blog to record ideas about the characters, plot, and setting of their own graphic novel.

Use tools like Wikispaces, <http://wikispaces.com>, to share thoughts about characters, plot, and settings. For instance, you might create a Comic Life page that explores the different visual representations of character, plot, or setting. Can you envision the setting for Tuck Everlasting? Why are there so many different images of Beowulf? Which do you prefer? Why? If you would like a space to share your project, use the wikispaces called *Characters in Literature*, <http://charactersinlit.wikispaces.com/>. You can add pages and information about the characters you explore, analyze, or create.

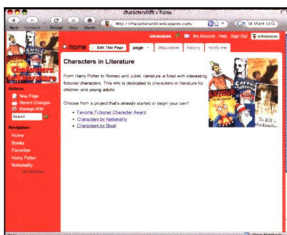
There is also a page started for *Settings in Literature*, <http://settingsinlit.wikispaces.com/>, where you can share your thoughts on the settings in existing books or stories you are writing. Read a traditional book. What would the book look like if it were turned into a graphic novel? What colors would be used? Would you use line drawings or photographs? Write about it and create a sample page of your graphic novel.

Involve students in writing their own books or extending existing books. Read a webcomic. Then:

- Write a story based on a character.
- Write another chapter for a book.
- Write an alternative ending to your book.
- Write a totally new story based on your personal experiences.

Classics Connections: Some people have observed that graphic novels bring the classic works of literature to a new audience.

FIGURE 2



Screen capture from Characters in Literature

Others say that these works are fakes and a poor alternative to the original versions. The key to success is engaging students in the stories through motivating activities.

Classical Comics, <http://www.classical-comics.com/>, is known for their graphic novel adaptations of classical literature. Their web site provides free downloads of study aids for *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Tempest*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Tempest*. Included are excerpts with empty speech balloons for students to complete.

Stone Arch Books provides a series of classics such as *Beowulf* and *Treasure Island* in the graphic novel format. Compare the visual version to the text version. You can find the text of many classics as well as previews of graphic novels at *Google Books*, <http://books.google.com>. How do they compare? Which do you prefer? Why? What do you gain and lose between the two formats?

Culture and Diversity Connections: The *Scrapyard Detectives*, <http://www.smilesfordiversity.org/scrapyard.php>, is a comic book series and provides lesson plans that can be downloaded as PDF files. The stories promote cooperation through diversity, knowledge, and understanding.

Webcomics sometimes focus on topics of cultural interest. *Hereville*, <http://www.hereville.com/>, focuses on an Orthodox Jewish Girl. *Rabbit and Bear Paws*, <http://www.rabbitandbearpaws.com/>, is a comic for young people set in 1750s colonial North America. The story follows two Native American brothers and is based on the teachings of the Anishinabeck community. Use these webcomics as inspiration for your own.

Historical Connections: From *The Adventures of Ellie Connelly* by Indigo Kelleigh,

<http://www.ellieconnelly.com/comics/>, set in Victorian times to *The Dreamer* by Lora Innes, <http://thedreamercomic.com/>, following the life of a teenage girl during the American Revolution, many webcomics have historical settings. It is interesting to involve students in activities that ask them to judge the accuracy of historical context. Do the backgrounds and fashions accurately depict the time period? Ask students to create a visual that compares the comic to historical photographs, artwork, or advertising of the time period depicted.

Infuse visuals and graphic novels into literature circle activities. For instance, *Hot Iron: The Adventures of a Civil War Powder Boy* by Michael Burgan from Stone Arch Books has a reading level of grades 2 and 3 but an interest level of grades 3 to 6 and would be a good alternative for a child who might not be successful reading other Civil War novels.

Use *Courage and Responsibility: The American Civil War* wiki, <http://civilwarlit.wikispaces.com/>, as a place to share information and visuals related to the unit.

Ask students reading traditional books such as *Iron Thunder* by Avi to create a comic for one chapter of their book. Use photographs from the *Library of Congress*, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/>, as a starting point.

Read the graphic novel *Surprise Attack! The Battle of Shiloh* by Larry Hama (Figure 3) and separate fact and fiction of the battle. Go to the *Osprey Graphic History* web site, <http://www.ospreygraphicshistory.com/>, for samples and excerpts. Concentrate on the people or places mentioned in the book and ask students to create their own historical comic.

The *Comix with Content* web site, <http://chestercomix.com/>, contains lesson plans to go with their many government and history-related comics.

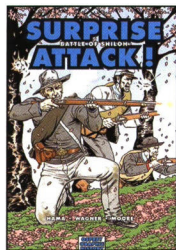
Math and Science Connections: Comic literature provides a new opportunity to incorporate reading into the math and science curriculum. For instance, *Laika* by Nick Abadzis (Figure 4), <http://www.nickabadzis.com/laika/>, is based on the true story of the first dog in space. The author's web site provides a great overview of the process for writing comic literature.

Larry Gonick is known for his engaging graphic texts on topics from statistics to



ANNEGAN GROVER
& SHARON GROVER

FIGURE 3



SECONDARY

Research shows that students who read for pleasure engage in fewer risky behaviors and maintain critical learning skills. Entice them this summer with these audiobooks representing both high quality literature and high quality production.

A Bloody Jack adventure: Curse of the blue tattoo. L.A. Meyer. Read by Katherine Kellgren. Listen & Live Audio, 2008. 978-1-59316-134-7. \$29.95. Grades 8 and up. Kellgren masterfully takes listeners on another rip-snorting ride with the indomitable Jacky (Mary) Faber as she navigates a world more dangerous than a frigate on the open sea—a proper boarding school for young ladies. Kellgren's fine portrayal of snobbish Bostonians, stable hands, a sinister clergyman, the wonderful Cockney Jacky, and more make this journey into 17th century history pure pleasure. A 2009 Odyssey Honor award winner.

The Graveyard book. Written and narrated by Neil Gaiman. Recorded Books, 2008. Library Edition CD: 978-1-4361-5884-8. \$77.75. Grades 6 and up. When a toddler's family is murdered in their beds, he escapes into a nearby graveyard where he is raised by the ghosts who inhabit the cemetery. Gaiman's reading of his 2009 Newbery-medal-winning book comes complete with eerie music and subtle voicing of the many characters encountered by the young boy. Listeners will be chilled by the ghostly goings-on as the boy becomes a teenager.

Nation. Terry Pratchett. Performed by Stephen Briggs. HarperChildren's Audio. C: 978-0-06-165821-1. \$29.95. Grades 6 and up. When a tsunami wipes out Mau's entire island nation, he must discover a different life for himself. In this quest he is joined by a castaway English girl and, together, the two young people forge a new future. Briggs ably gives voice to both humor and pathos while rendering individual personalities to Pratchett's fine cast of characters. A 2009 Odyssey Honor award winner.

Battle of Shiloh Comic Life Example

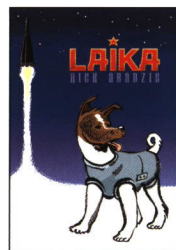
chemistry. Use the samples at his web site, <http://www.larrygonick.com/>, and his webcomics, http://blogs.discovery.com/raw_materials/, to inspire students to create comics as a chapter review, test preparation tool, or class book.

Consider an assignment that incorporates facts with a fictional account of a real event such as a natural disaster. Or ask students to write a preparation plan for a natural disaster in comic format. Rather than everyone doing the same thing, let students choose their earth science topic. Provide a few starter visuals from web sites such as the USGS, <http://gallery.usgs.gov/>. Students could mix in their own drawings with existing photographs and visuals.

COMIC LITERATURE IN YOUR LIBRARY

As you think about your comic literature collection, remember to consider technology resources along with print materials.

FIGURE 4



Laika cover art and interior page. Courtesy of First Second. <http://www.firstsecondbooks.com/BMR/laikaBMR.html>

Selection: When selecting webcomics for your elementary or middle school library, seek web sites that identify themselves as appropriate for "all-ages" such as *A Moment of Clarity* by John Bantz and *Sugary Serials*, <http://sugaryserials.com/>. Keep in mind that although a particular webcomic may be fine for children, the links to other comics may contain more mature content.

As you build your high school collection, the selection of materials becomes even more difficult because of the sex, violence, and mature themes of some comic literature. When writing descriptions for your blog or virtual library web site, be sure to include words of caution for your readers.

When exploring graphic novels, look for publishers that specialize in works for young people such as *First Second*, <http://www.firstsecondbooks.com/>.

Keep in mind that some materials contain labels. Many will indicate that they are for ALL AGES or just for MATURE AUDIENCES. Manga books sometimes use the following system: "A" for all ages, "Y" for youth, "T" for teen, "OT" for ages 16 and up, and "M" for Mature 18+.

Organization: Rather than simply building links at your school library web site, consider linking to both the current webcomic as well as the archives page. Also develop an author connections area for your web site.

Teach your students how to use tools such as *Google Reader*, <http://reader.google.com>, to subscribe to webcomic RSS feeds on their own.

Pathfinders: Consider the development of pathfinders related to popular graphic novels. These web resources might include links to the author and publisher web sites as well as materials associated with the theme of the book. For instance the *Amelia Rules*, <http://www.ameliarules.com/>, web site includes a wide range of activities and resources associated with the graphic novels including character notes, podcasts, and curriculum ideas.

Any of the Scholastic books contain activities and resources. For instance, the web site for *Amulet* by Kazu Kibuishi, <http://www.scholastic.com/amulet/>, contains areas to explore characters and even build your own comic with art from the book. *Banana-Tail*, <http://www.bananatail.com/>, is another example of a web site that combines reading comics with activities for kids.

Collaboration: As you develop partnerships with teachers to promote graphic reading, seek out lesson plans and other curriculum materials that support teaching with comic literature. For instance, *Using Graphic Novels with Children & Teens: Including BONE* by Jeff Smith, <http://content.scholastic.com/browse/collateral.jsp?id=1399>, provides a great overview of infusing comic literature in the classroom.

To learn more, go to our online workshop at <http://eduscapes.com/sessions/comics/>. Our next installment will appear in the October issue.

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